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Cables Detail Qaddafi's Operations

A series of State Department cables disclose the far-ranging, Libyan-sponsored acts of terrorism and subversion that aroused the Reagan administration's ire against Libyan troublemaker Muammar Qaddafi.

The cables covered five years of incidents, from the Italian island of Sardinia to the deserts of Sudan, each one chronicled in detail by U.S. Embassy officials in the countries targeted by Qaddafi and his assassins. A 1981 report by the State Department's intelligence and research bureau, which had been classified secret, attempted to sum up what was then known about Qaddafi and to share this information with U.S. embassies.

"Libya has been an active supporter of international terrorism since at least 1972," the intelligence analysis noted, citing evidence that Qaddafi had "targeted several world leaders" and carried out assassinations of Libyan exiles and dissidents in Europe and the Middle East.

"Qaddafi's current focus is on subversion of neighboring North African states," the report warned. It specified that Sudan, Niger, Mali and Chad "have been among his targets." The intelligence experts estimated that Qaddafi had spent "hundreds of millions in support of international terrorism since the early 1970s."

Among the disruptive actions Qaddafi's oil millions financed were "operational assistance" to subversive militants, provision of safe houses and weapons, the use of Libyan embassies "as support bases for terrorist operations," and the sharing of intelligence.

Interestingly, the 1981 report noted that Libya

also "provided false documentation for a variety of terrorists"—exactly what it was accused of doing for the terrorists who attacked the Rome and Vienna airports last December.

Reports from U.S. embassies in the next few years confirmed the 1981 intelligence warning. Here are some highlights of these cabled reports, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by our associate Lucette Lagrado:

- In July 1982, the Madrid embassy learned of a Libyan plot to assassinate Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. "The group which would carry out the murder had access, through a U.S. agency, intimately connected with the CIA, to the Saudi royal family's security measures," the embassy cabled.

- In March 1984, the embassy in Amman, Jordan, reported on a plot to destroy the Jordanian embassy in Libya. The cable said the Jordanian prime minister had provided details about the planned attack.

- In December 1982, the embassy in Rome reported a Libyan plot to help "separate Sardinia from Italy." Fifteen Sardinians had been arrested in the conspiracy. An Italian political party was implicated, as was "a Libyan by the name of Geri Mehed Tabet, currently at large, with whom the separatists apparently had contact in October 1981."

The Libyan government was to supply money for the breakaway militants, who planned "to undertake a number of ambitious acts of sabotage at airports and a NATO military base [and] to kidnap an American military officer."